

## ***NEWS RELEASE***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
MARCH 30, 2006

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### **DeNUCCI CITES MAJOR PROGRESS BY DSS IN CORRECTING FOSTER CARE DATA PROBLEMS**

State Auditor Joe DeNucci reported today that the Department of Social Services (DSS) has made significant progress toward correcting problems in its management of foster care services.

DeNucci said the improvements by DSS, which were made in response to his two prior audits, include a reduced error rate in its computerized foster care tracking system known as FamilyNet, and more timely criminal background checks of providers.

According to DeNucci's report, DSS' monthly Family Resource Report, compiled from FamilyNet data to monitor foster care providers and criminal background checks, had a 20 percent error rate during fiscal year 2005. That is down from a 52 percent error rate during the previous fiscal year. DSS has established a new position to review reports for data accuracy, review compliance by area office personnel, and conduct staff training on the use of FamilyNet reports to track licensing reassessment dates and CORI due dates.

DeNucci also reported that the department has improved the timeliness of CORI checks, although additional work is needed. The audit found 68 foster care providers with overdue or blank CORI records during fiscal year 2005, down from 133 in the previous fiscal year.

Progress was also made in DSS' foster home licensing procedures, although that too needs further improvement. A total of 340 children were placed in foster homes prior to the home being licensed, down from 708 children during the previous fiscal year. Lack of proper licensing could result in children being placed in an unsafe environment.

Due to a reduction in the number of hearing officers, DSS continues to have a significant backlog in requests for open fair appeal hearings, as 3,910 of 5,009 requests from 1998 through 2005 had not been scheduled. However, the department indicated that it has received additional funding to hire additional fair hearing officers.

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DeNucci's audit noted that DSS has resolved a problem identified in his prior audit concerning documentation of judicial determinations. The previous report found that DSS could not locate the legal records to document judicial determinations for three of 25 cases selected for review, making these cases ineligible for federal reimbursement. However, DeNucci's follow-up review disclosed that the department has implemented new technology to address this issue. A review of 25 cases during fiscal year 2004 found that judicial determination documentation was complete.

Last year, DSS received a \$1 million appropriation from the Legislature to implement Auditor DeNucci's recommendations for corrective action in his two previous reports.

"Many of the problems identified in my reports were the result of staff reductions at DSS in recent years," said DeNucci. "I am pleased that the Legislature has given the department additional resources for corrective action, because state government has no greater responsibility than to protect the 10,000 children living in foster and group homes. There is still much work to be done, but the response of DSS in my latest audit is very encouraging."